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## Editorial

# Hold the Arroyo regime liable for the miserable plight of the people

**T**he Arroyo regime must be held accountable for the unparalleled sufferings of the Filipino people. The soaring prices of rice, petroleum products and other basic goods and commodities are rooted in Arroyo's antipeople economic policies that have been bleeding the masses dry for more than a decade. The people rage like a seething volcano. Their grinding poverty in the face of the big bureaucrat-capitalists' insatiable greed fuels their anger and pushes them to intensify their protests to oust Arroyo.

The people hold Gloria Arroyo accountable for pushing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1998, implementing economic liberalization and completely subjugating the country to imperialist globalization. Under GATT, liberalization in agriculture was accelerated by succeeding regimes. This move, in particular, resulted in diminishing government subsidies to agriculture and the eventual removal of whatever little state support there was for

from other countries flooded the local market, putting local agricultural production in a stranglehold and obliterating the country's capability for food self-sufficiency. Globalization policies also promoted the massive conversion of agricultural land from rice and corn production to the planting of cash crops for export.

The pro-imperialist and antipeople GATT is the biggest catastrophe that has befallen the Filipino peasantry. Its devastating effect on local agriculture has proven to be far worse than the destruction wrought by any other supertyphoon that has hit the country. From being a rice-exporting country, the Philippines has now been reduced to becoming the biggest rice importer in Asia.

Worse, despite the importation of rice, corn and other grain from abroad, prices of these basic commodities continue to rise sky-high due to supply and

the sector. It opened the country to the unbri-dled en-try of agri-cultural im-ports.

Rice, corn, beef, pork, chicken and related products



## This issue's highlights...

Severe rice crisis

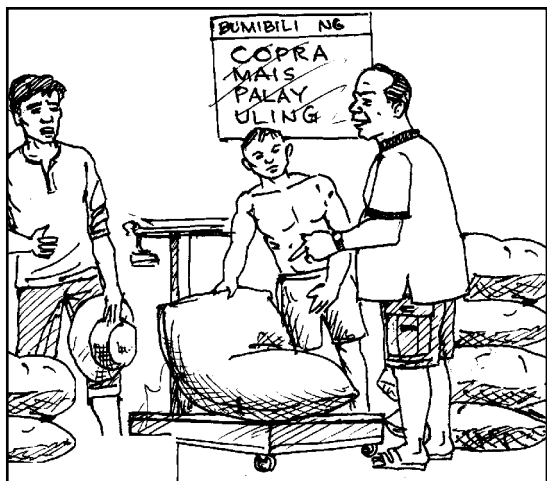
PAGE 2

Corruption in swine program

PAGE 4

NPA victories in Mindanao

PAGE 5



price manipulation by unscrupulous elements usually in cahoots with Malacañang.

Despite widespread poverty, however, wages and salaries of workers and employees remain pegged at extremely low levels.

It is the Arroyo regime's subservience to foreign interests and its avaricious plunder of the country's wealth that lie at the roots of the deep-seated economic crisis and severe poverty gripping the whole nation. The people are left with no other option but to oust Arroyo's plundering, brutal and reactionary puppet regime.

In the long run, it is only the overthrow of a system that produces such regimes that can finally liberate the peo-

## Severe rice crisis

The Arroyo regime is frenziedly trying to extinguish growing unrest among the people brought about by spiraling prices of rice. The issue is a visceral one as it literally hits the guts of an already hungry and impoverished people. It drives them to tread the road of protest.

Arroyo has ordered the importation of 1.5 million tons of rice from Thailand and Vietnam in a desperate attempt to "solve" the rice supply problem. She has also ordered the establishment of rolling stores managed by soldiers where rice is sold on ration. In a move to score public relations points with farmers, she has called on the National Food Authority (NFA) to raise the buying price of palay from P12 to P17 per kilo. She has also boasted that her government has allocated huge funds for agricultural support.

These are all band-aid solutions and desperate attempts to deceive the people. It will be remembered that in February, the regime feigned ignorance at the then looming food shortage worldwide, even belying reports of an impending rice crisis in the Philippines as late as the first week of March. Up to now, it insists that rice supplies are adequate.

The Arroyo regime and its cabal are sure to pocket the P43.7 billion support funds for food, just like what happened in previous agricultural programs. Like the fertilizer scam before and the swine scam now, there are no clear conduits for these funds and no mechanisms in place for proper disposal and accounting.

Peasant groups, progressive organizations and a wide section of the citizenry sternly condemn Arroyo's rantings, saying that all she does is talk and spend millions of pesos on media hype that have no other objective but to promote herself.

Peasant groups and advocates strongly demand the following:

### 1. Implement a genuine agrarian reform program. Wide-

spread poverty in the countryside and the backwardness of the agricultural sector trace its roots to the monopoly control of landlords over millions of hectares of agricultural land. The bogus, anomalous, loophole-ridden, pro-landlord Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program should therefore be scrapped. The right of peasants to the land they till must be upheld. They must be provided much-needed agricultural subsidies to raise productivity.

### 2. Junk the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA) and reverse the liberalization of agriculture.

The dismal performance of local production is one of the biggest factors in reduced rice supplies and the coun-



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## Contents

### Editorial

Hold the Arroyo regime liable for the miserable plight of the people	1
Chronic rice crisis	2
Protests against steep food prices	3
Spiraling prices of rice, other staples	3
Insufficient local rice production	4
Corruption in "swine program"	4

### Victorious NPA offensives

NPA offensives in Mindanao	5
NPA tactical offensives	6

### Fascist state on a rampage

Human rights advocates honored	6
Investigation on Palparan cases	6
Illegal arrests and repression	7
Supreme Court rules in favor of Neri	8

### News

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try's import dependence. The prevailing rice shortage and soaring prices of the staple in the world market have serious impacts on the country, it being the top importer of rice in Asia. Likewise, import liberalization of agricultural products results in the further bankruptcy of local farmers, including rice and corn cultivators.

**3. Impose a moratorium on land-use and crop conversion.** Even the regime admits that one of the biggest factors in the decline of the country's capacity to produce its own supply of rice and other staples is the massive conversion of agricultural lands. Data from the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics show that agricultural land decreased from 10 million to 9.7 million hectares. Land devoted to agricultural production has been declining annually. In 2004-2005, for instance, there was a reduction of 56,200 hectares or 1.4% in land used for agricultural purposes. Land use for rice production also diminished from 4.13 million hectares in 2004 to 4.07 million hectares in 2005.

**4. Increase farmgate prices of palay and other agricultural products by at least 25%.** The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas is also proposing a ceiling on the price of commercial rice at ₱25/kilo and ₱18.75/kilo for NFA rice. This way, farmers can be properly compensated and consumers' welfare protected at the same time. AB

## Protests against steep food prices

**W**orkers, urban poor and youth led by the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan demonstrated at the Trabaho Market in Sampaloc, Manila on April 2 by clanging on pots and pans in protest of the soaring prices of rice and other food commodities.

In the evening, simultaneous noise barrages were also held in Taguig, Parañaque, Pasay, Caloocan and other Metro Manila cities. Similar protest actions are expected to occur in the coming weeks in the face of continued increases in the prices of basic commodities.

In a survey conducted by Pulse Asia from February 21 to March 8, almost 66% or two in every three Filipinos feel they are poorer now compared to 2005. AB

## Spiraling prices of rice and other staples

**N**ews about skyrocketing prices of rice have been dominating the headlines these past weeks. From ₱25 per kilo, rice prices soared to between ₱32 and ₱38 per kilo, even reaching ₱40 per kilo in some areas in Quezon province. Prices are expected to rise to as much as ₱50 per kilo in the coming months.

The Arroyo regime strains to deny that a rice shortage exists. Its own documents reveal, however, that the country's rice supply will be depleted by June. Its major sources of imports, namely Vietnam, Thailand and Pakistan have put restrictions on supplies, forcing the regime to obtain 100,000 metric tons of rice from the United States on credit in order to guarantee rice supply from May 15 to August 15.

Arroyo's desperate moves only bely her earlier pronouncements that rice supplies are adequate. DA Secretary Arthur Yap, in fact, has even come up with the absurd proposal of asking restaurant owners to serve half, instead of full cups of rice. There was even talk of restricting rice purchases to one kilo each per customer.

The DA's order to the NFA to raise the farmgate price of palay is useless. Aside from the fact that the harvest season is over, the NFA only procures a minimal volume of palay from farmers. NFA Administrator Jessuf Navarro admits that the agency has only bought one percent of the total local palay production in the past two years.

Meanwhile, corn prices have also increased from ₱6 a kilo to ₱17-18 a kilo. Regular corn is being sold at ₱23 per kilo while premium varieties cost ₱25 per kilo, making a 50-kilo sack of corn cost ₱960 to ₱967.50.

Prices of other commodities like pork, flour, milk and fish have likewise spiked. A kilo of pork started costing as much as ₱200 this April, according to the National Federation of Hog Farmers. AB



### Insufficient local rice production

SINCE the Philippines was put under the aegis of imperialist globalization, the country has consistently been dependent on the importation of rice and other agricultural products. From 722,000 tons in 1997, rice importation reached a staggering 1.7 million tons in 2006.

Agricultural production is practically at a standstill, with growth slowing down from 1.4% in 1990-1995 to a mere 0.6% from 1996 to 2000.

From being an exporter of agricultural products in the 1970s and 1980s, the Philippines has become a net importer since the 1990s. The trade deficit, on the other hand, has ballooned from \$0.257 billion in 1991 to 1994 to about \$3.347 billion in 1995 to 1998.

The country has to import up to two million tons of rice per year to compensate for insufficient local production.

AB

## Lawyer bares corruption in "swine program"

**A**nother major case of corruption perpetrated by the Arroyo regime came to the fore in April. Close to P1.1 billion out of the P5 billion funds intended for a "swine dispersal program" could not be traced and is believed to have been used in the 2004 elections. The disclosures were made by Atty. Harry Roque of the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Law.

According to the Commission on Audit (COA) report in 2005, the Department of Agriculture (DA) drafted and implemented the "swine program" with the purpose of giving financial support to farmers who wanted to engage in a hog-raising business. The program took effect before the 2004 elections.

Both former DA Sec. Luis "Cito" Lorenzo and incumbent DA Sec. Arthur Yap had intimate knowledge of this project. Yap was then National Food Authority (NFA) administrator and like Lorenzo, was also a board member of the Quedan and Rural Credit Guarantee Corp. (Quendacor), the government-owned agency charged with managing funds for the swine program.

As what happened in then Undersecretary of Agriculture Jocelyn "Joc-joc" Bolante's "fertilizer scam," funds for the "swine pro-

gram" were believed to have been diverted for the personal use of Arroyo and her cabal. This time, the funds involved are believed to be much bigger because the program is directly linked to Arroyo aside from the fact that Quedancor as the project's fund manager reports directly to her office.

The 2005 COA report shows that there was P1.1 billion in unaccounted funds out of the P1.66 billion funds allegedly spent for the program. The "swine program" had initial funds of P2.25 billion before it was granted an additional P5 billion to provide adequate funds to farmers aiming to put up piggeries. The remaining funds for the program were deposited at the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), the report revealed.

The project did not pass through the usual "public bidding." The suppliers contracted were the Iloilo Feeds Corp., Nueva Foods Corp., BIRKS Agri-Livestock that won a P583 million contract, Silverstock (P480 million), ACL Corp. and Metro Livestock (P383 million).

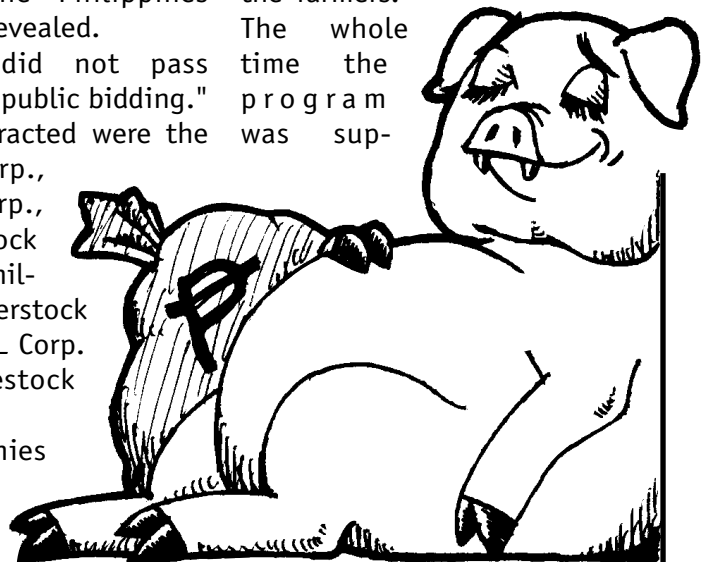
These companies were obviously "dummy corporations" set up on-

ly in 2003, a year before the program was organized. None of the companies had sufficient funds to manage big projects. The documents also disclosed that the same set of people sits in the board of directors of all four companies and that the companies were owned by just a handful of people. Not one of the companies was registered with the Bureau of Animal Industry. The contracts never identified anyone who would serve as guarantor should the companies default on their loans.

Pursuant to the program, Quedancor released funds to the four companies as initial payments for the pigs dispersed to

the farmers.

The whole time the program was sup-



posed to be in operation, Quedancor failed to produce even a single receipt, voucher, document or any piece of paper that could be used to trace and account the movements of funds.

An investigation by COA revealed that a good number of farmers listed as beneficiaries were only asked to sign blank receipts in exchange for P200 to P300. None of them received any hogs or any funds other than this amount. Now that the Senate is demanding a list of beneficiaries, Quedancor lamely answered that the list was missing.

Anomalies pertaining to funds released by Quedancor surfaced as early as 2003. Several documents showed that the LBP was demanding P300 million from Quedancor to settle its loans and another P2 million to pay for arranger and attorney's fees. These amounts are excessive considering that the transactions were between two government offices. Up to P747 million in funds were spent in the 2004 elections. Fund releases were expedited in July 2004 right after Arroyo implemented Executive Order 322 placing Quedancor under the direct supervision of the Office of the President.

The swine program's design is intrinsically flawed as it was evidently intended to channel funds for the personal use of Arroyo and her party. It did not stipulate processes and guarantees to ensure that the loans would be repaid. Should a debtor default, the transaction would simply be posted under "bad debts".

In addition, it is not true that there was a hog shortage in 2003, the first time the program took effect and billions of funds were released to jumpstart the scheme. Government statistics revealed that hog production even increased by 3.9% from 2001 to



## Victorious NPA offensives in Mindanao

Successful NPA offensives in Mindanao have significantly contributed to the sustained advancement of revolutionary struggles in the Philippines. Thus declared NDF-Mindanao spokesperson Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos on the occasion of the NPA's 39th anniversary on March 29. The victories were achieved with the people's unwavering support.

NPA units in Mindanao launched a total of 350 tactical offensives in 2007, an increase of 50 offensives compared to the 300 launched in 2006. From January to March this year alone, over 20 tactical offensives were carried out, according to preliminary reports.

The Red fighters in the island were able to conduct both annihilative and attritive battles along with special military actions. Over 300 high-powered arms were seized by the NPA in Mindanao. In 2007 alone, the enemy suffered casualties equivalent to a battalion. Among the NPA's victorious tactical offensives were the raid on Dapecol, Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte (100 firearms seized); in Cantilan, Surigao del Sur (18 firearms); and in Lawan-lawan, Las Nieves, Agusan del Norte (14 firearms).

The NPA guerrillas captured a number of regular and paramilitary troopers in military actions in the regions of Southern Mindanao, Far South Mindanao, North Central Mindanao and North Eastern Mindanao, with some of them kept in custody for over a month. The prisoners of war (POW) thanked the Red guerrillas upon their release for the humane treatment they received from the comrades. The NPA exercises rigid revolutionary discipline in treating POWs, following rules on the conduct of war stipulated in the Geneva Conventions and the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. The POWs were released on humanitarian grounds.

The NPA is now rooted in more than 20 provinces, close to 200 towns and cities and 2,000 barrios in Mindanao. Areas of operation have expanded in Southern Mindanao, North Central Mindanao and Far South Mindanao.

In spite of brutal military attacks, the number of guerrilla fronts increased from 35 in 2005-2006 to 39 in 2008. This year, the Eastern Mindanao Command of the AFP failed to achieve its target of dismantling 11 guerrilla fronts. The AFP Western Mindanao Command likewise

failed to dismantle three guerrilla fronts in its area of responsibility. The number of company-size guerrilla fronts increased while the majority composed of platoon-size guerrilla continue to gain strength. **AB**



## Victorious NPA tactical offensives

TWO military elements belonging to the 13th IB were killed on the spot when Red fighters under the Napoleon Tumagtang Command assaulted their unit in San Remigio, Antique on April 4. Initial field reports said that the Red guerrillas detonated land mines while the soldiers were headed for their detachment in Barangay Bulan-bulan in the said town.

In a similar incident, NPA guerrillas under the Domingo Erlano Command raided a camp of the 69th IB Bravo Company in Casiguran, Aurora on March 24. The gunfight lasted 15 minutes, leaving two government soldiers wounded while the Red guerrillas managed to retreat unharmed.

Meanwhile, more than seven enemy soldiers were killed and two others wounded in two separate clashes between NPA guerrillas and elements of the 50th IB on March 21 and 25 in Barangay Tubtuba, Tubo, Abra. The enemy troopers fired mortar shells towards the encounter site three times.

The Red fighters withdrew without sustaining any casualties and without losing any firearms.

These NPA attacks on the AFP were in support of the people of Abra struggling against the intrusion of foreign mining companies. The AFP serves as the security force of various mining firms such as the Olympus Pacific Minerals Inc., Abra Mining and Industrial Corporation and Jabel Corporation. AB



FASCIST STATE ON A RAMPAGE

## Human rights advocates honored

**A**tt. Romeo Capulong and Fr. Joe Dizon were recently honored for relentlessly defending human rights and promoting the cause of the people. Atty. Romeo Capulong was dubbed the "people's lawyer" by various human rights groups, fellow lawyers and friends for his unwavering promotion of the interests of the poor and oppressed. The tribute was held at the Quezon City Sports Club on April 3.

Attorney Capulong served as the lead lawyer of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines

(NDFP) in its negotiations with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. He is also known for handling cases of political detainees and other victims of human rights violations.

Prof. Jose Ma. Sison and Luis Jalandoni of the NDFP also paid him tribute, along with Rep. Satur Ocampo and Teodoro Casiño of Bayan Muna, Rep. Liza Maza of Gabriela Women's Party and former congressmen Rafael Mariano and Joel Viador, who were present in the oc-

*Continued on "Militants..." on page 7*

## Karapatan demands further investigation on Palparan cases

Human rights group Karapatan called for an investigation of cases faced by Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan (ret.), a rabid follower of Arroyo infamous for his grave human rights violations and brutal military abuses.

Karapatan's demand was in reaction to a report released by Human Rights Watch (HRW) stating that no military official has ever been convicted nor put to trial for the hundreds of extrajudicial killings and thousands of cases of other human rights violations perpetrated by the military. HRW assailed the Arroyo regime for its inaction over these cases.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Council is set to conduct a Universal Periodic Review on the Philippines on April 11 in Geneva, Switzerland. Human rights groups such as Karapatan are expected to present their own report on the current state of human rights in the country.

The European Union (EU) also called on the Arroyo regime to stop including names of activists and other progressives in the AFP's "order of battle". The EU likewise criticized the regime's inaction over the involvement of military officials in extrajudicial killings. In this regard, the EU has decided to send a Justice Assistance Mission to the Philippines after an earlier investigation conducted by the EU Needs Assistance Mission. According to the latter's evaluation, extrajudicial killings in the Philippines remain a "serious problem." AB

# Illegal arrests and repression from March to the first week of April

**I**llegal arrests and repression marked human rights violations monitored by *Ang Bayan* from March 10 to April 3.

**April 3.** Men suspected to be on the payroll of comprador Lucio Tan sent death threats to *Philippine Daily Inquirer*-Palawan correspondent Redempto Ando. The victim suspects that the death threats are related to an article he wrote about alleged plans by MacroAsia, a mining company owned by Tan to pressure the government against declaring Mt. Mantalingahan a protected area. Mt. Mantalingahan is the site of the last remaining forest in southern Palawan.

**March 28.** Detained National Democratic Front of the Philippines consultant Elizabeth Principe con-

demned the Arroyo regime for presenting false witnesses, including a woman, to conceal the irregularities surrounding her abduction in November 2007. She said that all her abductors were big, muscular and agile men. The witnesses presented to the Court of Appeals were nowhere near that description. She also filed a writ of habeas corpus for her husband Leo Velasco who was abducted in Cagayan de Oro City in February 2007.

**March 24.** Pamalakaya has asked the Commission on Human Rights to conduct an immediate investigation on the intelligence operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in several towns in Laguna, notably in areas near the Laguna Industrial Park. The operations involve house-



to-house searches, the imposition of a curfew and the tailing of militant leaders in the province.

Pamalakaya complained that the military soldiers were listing down names of residents who belong to the Kilusang Mayo Uno, the urban poor organization Kadamay and other legal organizations that Malacañang and the AFP have tagged as "communist fronts." The military harassment is believed to be linked to the opposition of these groups to the massive demolition of communities covered by the Northrail project.

**March 23.** The family of Muslim imam Muhammad Bani, 27, filed complaints of torture against the Intelligence Service Group (ISG) and the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG). Bani and his friend Al-Midzbar Bunajal, 24, were arrested by ISG and CIDG elements in Boracay Island, Aklan on March 9. Both were accused of being members of the bandit group Abu Sayyaf and involvement in the 2001 Dos Palmas, Palawan kidnap-for-ransom case.

**March 22.** A security guard of

## "Militants..." from page 6

casion. National Artist Bienvenido Lumbera likewise paid him tribute.

Also present at the event were Rep. Jose Yap of Tarlac, Vice Governor Thomas Joson of Nueva Ecija, former Undersecretary Josie Lichauco of the Department of Transportation and former Integrated Bar of the Philippines president Jose Grapilon.

Earlier, on March 10, the Tji Hak-soon Justice and Peace Foundation of Korea granted the Justice and Peace Award to Fr. Joe Dizon and the Worker's Assistance Center Inc. (WAC). The award is given annually by the Korean Catholic Foundation to individuals and organizations who have made remarkable contributions to the quest for peace and justice.

The award honors the exceptional efforts of WAC these past 12 years in defending workers' rights and uplifting workers' welfare in the export-processing zones of Cavite, despite severe repression.

WAC started as a socio-pastoral program in 1995. It struggled to defend workers' rights and conduct trainings for workers in the Cavite Export Processing Zone, the country's biggest, where the "no union, no strike" policy is being implemented and where repression and violation of workers' rights are prevalent.

From the first union of 30 members that WAC established in 1997, it has been able to expand to more than nine unions with a 10,000-strong membership coming from various foreign-owned factories. "We broke through the repression," stated Father Dizon.

AB

Oceana Gold Philippines Inc. shot and wounded Emilio Pumihic in Didipio, Kasibu, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya while the latter was trying to save his neighbor Samuel Bidang. The mining company was currently conducting a demolition in the area while Bidang was asleep inside his house. Oceana Gold is an Australian mining company that was granted mining rights by the Arroyo regime over vast tracts of land in Didipio. The residents have long been opposed to these mining operations.

**March 20.** Combined operatives of the Intelligence Service of the AFP and the PNP in Region 4A illegally arrested couple Jaime Soledad, 58, and Clarita Luego, 50, in Camella Springville Subdivision, Molino, Bacoar, Cavite. The arresting officers failed to present a warrant of arrest when they took the couple. Soledad and Luego underwent intensive interrogation for three days and were deprived of their right to see their relatives and consult a lawyer. The military only confirmed that the couple was under their custody when a journalist reported that he saw Soledad and Luego in the office of the PNP Region 4 intelligence chief.

The AFP and PNP were forced to release Luego a few days after the abduction after failing to file charges against her. Soledad, on the other hand, is being charged with trumped-up cases linking him to two ambushes by the New People's Army in Leyte in the 1990s. AB

## Supreme Court rules in favor of Neri

In a vote of 9-6 last March 25, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of former NEDA Secretary Romuno Neri's appeal to prevent the Senate from forcing him to disclose everything he knows about the anomalous NBN-ZTE project.

The Supreme Court decision stated that exchanges between Neri and Gloria Arroyo allegedly pertaining to "diplomatic issues" were covered by "executive privilege." Pursuant to this decision, the Senate could not oblige Neri to answer questions related to this topic. The Senate is set to file a motion for reconsideration.

The high court likewise declared illegal the Senate's order to arrest Neri, citing the flimsy argument that the upper chamber had failed to publish its rules on investigations—which the Senate belied.

The highly criticized Supreme Court decision is expected to be abused by government officials to refuse participation in future Senate investigations on corruption cases.

In a dissenting opinion, Chief Justice Reynato Puno said that "executive privilege" cannot be invoked to hide possible government crimes.

In essence, the decision restores Executive Order 464 issued by Gloria Arroyo preventing all Cabinet-level government officials from attending Senate and Congressional hearings without her permission. The Supreme Court actually reversed its own decision in 2006 declaring some of EO 464's key provisions illegal.

This recent votation is expected to serve as precedent for future Supreme Court decisions, especially since a number of magistrates are set to retire and will be replaced by Arroyo appointees. AB

## 400 children victims of militarization

CLOSE to 423 children were victims of intensifying military operations under the Arroyo regime from January to March 2008 alone. These were the findings released by the Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC) during the commemoration of the first death anniversary of Grecil Buya, a nine-year old child murdered by soldiers in Compostela Valley.

Grecil was shot at close range by an enemy soldier in a clash on March 31, 2007. To cover up the crime, the Armed Forces of the Philippines branded Grecil a child guerrilla and released a photograph to the media showing her dead body beside an M16 armalite rifle whose length exceeded her height. Both her family and Grecil's neighbors vehemently belied the allegation. In spite of this, the soldiers were exonerated by the Commission on Human Rights.

The CRC report concluded that Arroyo's all-out war policy, which it has been prioritizing to the detriment of social services will definitely worsen the plight of children and further place them in danger.

## Filipino migrant workers hold protest actions in Hong Kong

MORE than 2,000 migrant Filipino workers in Hong Kong took to the streets on March 31 to demand the removal from power of Gloria Arroyo, who was there on a three-day state visit.

The protesters led by the Gloria Step Down Movement-Hong Kong chapter and United Filipinos in Hong Kong said Arroyo was shameless for boasting that the economy has been improving when the plight of the Filipino people, migrant workers included, was actually worsening. Also joining the rally were the Human Rights Commission, Justice and Peace Commission of the HK Catholic Diocese, Asia Monitor Resource

Centre and Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants.

Meanwhile, in solidarity with the oust Arroyo movement, migrant Filipino workers launched on April 5 "zero remittance day," where they desisted from sending remittances to their families the entire day. They called it a gift to the fake president, who was then celebrating her birthday. This move, according to Maita Santiago of Migrante, is a strong statement from the migrants declaring that they have had enough of the regime's neglect. They also demanded that Arroyo step down especially since she has done nothing to alleviate the sorry plight of migrant workers.

### KMP slams deception on Sumilao farmers

**T**HE Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) condemned the Arroyo regime for its betrayal of the Sumilao farmers from Bukidnon who for years have been fighting to reclaim their land. The regime, together with San Miguel Food Inc. (SMFI) and even Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales, made it appear that the Sumilao case had been settled via an agreement that was a "win-win solution."

Pursuant to the agreement, SMFI will voluntarily donate 50 hectares of the disputed land to the farmers. The farmers, however, will have to pay for the remaining 94 hectares to completely take hold of the 144 hectares that should have long ago been distributed to them. Now it appears that it is the farmers who owe a "debt of gratitude" to SMFI.

The end-result demonstrates the inutility of the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), added KMP. The Sumilao farmers have been deceived because there is actually no assurance that they will eventually own the land, including the 50 hectares allegedly donated by SMFI. The farmers will also have to buy the remaining land from the government at current market prices. This scheme does not consider the fact that most poor peasants are incapable of paying monthly amortizations. Requiring them to pay will result in their eventual bankruptcy, with the farmers forced to give up their land for sale. In the case of the Sumilao farmers, the land is sure to end up again in the hands of SMFI.

It is a great insult and a supreme deception to farmers to use the Sumilao-SMFI case to defend CARP's extension, said KMP. It added that it is CARP's pro-landlord character that is at the root of the injustice done to the Sumilao farmers. The government was forced to attend to this matter only because of the Sumilao farmers' relentless struggle for their land and the widespread support they received.

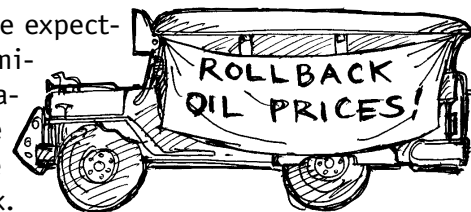
### Oil price hikes most frequent under the Arroyo regime

THE most frequent oil price increases ensued under the Arroyo regime, according to a research study by Ibon Foundation. The study shows that since 2001, gas prices increased by 196%, diesel by 168%, unleaded gas by 151%, regular gasoline by 150% and premium gasoline by 147%. From P15 per liter in 2003, diesel prices have now soared to almost P40 per liter.

In view of this, Ibon has called for the abolition of the Value Added Tax imposed on petroleum products. In 2006, the P49.15 billion earned by the Arroyo administration from oil taxes were passed on to consumers by oil companies in the form of higher pump prices.

Ibon moreover urgently demanded the repeal of Republic Act 8479, better known as the Downstream Oil Industry Deregulation Act of 1998, which gives foreign companies complete freedom to raise prices of petroleum products.

Drivers and jeepney operators support this call. Piston, the nationwide alliance of drivers and operators, is already preparing to launch a series of protest actions that are expected to culminate in a nationwide strike in the coming week.



### 1,000 Iraqi puppet troops desert

OVER 1,000 military troops and policemen of the Iraqi puppet regime deserted in the heat of a gunbattle with Shiite fighters in Basra, Iraq in the last week of March. A high-ranking government official reported that among those who withdrew were dozens of officers including two leading field commanders. They simply retreated from the fight and abandoned their posts.

The desertion only demonstrates the puppet security force's incapacity to sustain the war against the Iraqi liberation force that the United States initiated.

As a result, Prime Minister Nouri Kamal al-Maliki immediately deployed some 10,000 new recruits from the Shiite tribe, angering the Sunni.

In 2007, up to 15% of the total Iraqi military and police puppet forces deserted.